



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

STATE ADVISORY PANEL ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

2013 - 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

**Findings, Analysis and Recommendations: A Review of
Education Programs and Services for Students with Disabilities
in the District of Columbia**

July 1, 2014



The District of Columbia State Advisory Panel on Special Education

July 1, 2014

The Honorable Vincent C. Gray, Mayor

The District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chair

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor of Education

Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 303
Washington, DC 20004

Jesús Aguirre, State Superintendent of Education

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
810 First Street, NE – 9th Floor
Washington, DC 20002

Laura Slover, President

District of Columbia State Board of Education
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 723
Washington, DC 20001

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Mayor Gray, Councilmember Mendelson, Deputy Mayor of Education Smith, State Superintendent of Education Aguirre, and State Board of Education President Slover:

The State Advisory Panel on Special Education (SAP, Panel) is pleased to deliver its 2013-2014 Annual Report.

The SAP serves as an advisory body to the Mayor, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the District's State Education Agency (SEA), on matters pertaining to the education of children and youth with disabilities served by public and private agencies in The District of Columbia.

The Panel's primary responsibility is to advise OSSE and its Division of Specialized Education (DSE) on unmet needs of students with disabilities, including the development of evaluations, reports, and corrective action plans in response to federal monitoring. It also provides policy guidance and recommendations regarding procedures to coordinate education and related services for students with disabilities, using its members' personal expertise and experiences as present and past consumers or providers of the State's services.

A summary of our activities, findings and recommendations are included in this report.

We wish to commend and thank the Leadership of OSSE for its superb administrative support, as well as ongoing communication and involvement with the Panel as they developed innovative or enhanced policies, procedures and programs. This was an unusually busy year which saw a change in both OSSE's Leadership and the Panel's governance. In addition, there was a noticeable decline in the active participation of a number of appointed Panel members, particularly those who were to represent the important Child-Serving State Agencies. While change is almost always very disruptive to an organization and supporters, there was no change in the Panel's commitment to serve students with educational challenges and their families.

As Chairperson, I wish to thank Daryl Gorman, Director of DC Boards and Commissions; OSSE-DSE's staff liaison, Desirée Brown, Special Projects Manager, Community and Parent Relations; as well as panel members: Ja'Sent Brown, Julie Camerata, Betsy Clyde Centofanti, Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas, Elizabeth Rihani, Rebecca Salon, Shawn Ullman, and Molly Whalen, all of whom went beyond the call of duty to ensure the Panel's success.

The panel worked closely with OSSE-DSE, and commends the positive forward progress that the staff of OSSE-DSE has made this year in: policy formation, implementation of

Hearing Officer Determinations (HOD's), Early Childhood Transition, and Transportation. It is clear that these positive efforts are creating stability in a system which has had a long history of instability, and noncompliance, with the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

While the June 23, US Department of Education 2014 Determination Letter to Superintendent Aguirre still indicated a "Needs Intervention Determination" for the State, it also noted substantial progress in areas which have been problematic since the early 1970's. We look forward to helping the Agency address the critical issues which need correction. More importantly we pledge to monitor the continued implementation of such policies and practices, and to advocate for improved quality of the services which are now provided. It is important that there is widespread involvement and commitment throughout the City, if work of the Panel is to be meaningful. Therefore, it is imperative for the 2014-15 Panel to build upon the work of this year, and continue to focus on key areas within special education which demand ongoing review and problem solving. Because time constraints on parents and volunteers are more pressing than ever, recruitment and use of these valuable volunteers must be decidedly different from the original 1970's SAP model.

The appointments, roles responsibilities configuration of future SAPs must be reexamined, so that the greatest number of concerned constituents can fully participate.

It has been my pleasure to serve as Chair of this dynamic, caring group of Panel members.

Respectfully Submitted,

Senora D. Simpson, *Chair*

District of Columbia

State Advisory Panel on Special Education

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State Advisory Panel on Special Education Membership

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I. OVERVIEW

This 2014 annual report of the State Advisory Panel on Special Education for the District of Columbia is respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council of the District of Columbia. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), (Authority) 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(A)) CFR 34 Part 300 §300.167, requires that the state establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the state. The State Advisory Panel for the District of Columbia is appointed by the Mayor and is composed of members from the public and private sectors – including parents of children with disabilities, advocates, representatives of state agencies and educators - representing a wide variety of perspectives and interests related to the education of children with disabilities. Throughout the year, Panel members meet to discuss, review and analyze issues relevant to the education of children and youth with disabilities in the District of Columbia. This report summarizes the activities and recommendations of the District's State Advisory Panel for the period of time from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014.

According to the official Child Count data, conducted on December 1, 2013 by each LEA and certified to OSSE there are **11,043** students in DC special education.

The purpose of this report is to provide policymakers, educators, parents, and the general public with an overview of the major concerns and issues raised and reviewed by the members of the Panel during the 2013-14 terms and to provide recommendations and benchmarks for future, necessary improvement in Special Education which can be used by succeeding panels.

The report is published by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and is available at the OSSE website: <http://osse.dc.gov>.

II. PURPOSE, FUNCTION, AND COMPOSITION OF THE STATE ADVISORY PANEL ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

Purpose and Functions

As detailed in the Mayor's Order 2012-48, effective April 5, 2012 the purpose of the District of Columbia's State Advisory Panel on Special Education ("the Panel") is to serve as an advisory body to the Mayor, the District of Columbia Public Schools and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE - formerly the State Education Office) on matters pertaining to the education of children and youth with disabilities served by public and private agencies of the District of Columbia.

Functions of the panel include, but are not limited to: advising on unmet needs of students with disabilities, reporting to the US Department of Education, developing corrective action plans, education of students with disabilities incarcerated in adult prisons, and coordination and delivery of special education and related services; reviewing and commenting on proposed legislation, regulations, and policies, as well as the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report; and preparing an annual report of its activities and recommendations for the Mayor, OSSE, and other District agencies.

Composition of the Panel

The SAP is appointed by the Mayor through the Office of Boards and Commissions. The Panel consists of *at least* 15 voting members, the majority of whom must be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities. Other members of the SAP include representatives from schools, District agencies that serve children, and community organizations that demonstrate an interest in issues affecting special education.

(See Appendix A for a complete list of Panelists and their area of representation.)

III. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The Panel is required to convene at least four (4) meetings each calendar year. The schedule of meetings for the school year 2013 - 2014 was as follows:

Meeting Date	Time	Location
September 19, 2013	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) 810 First Street, NE – 8 (Conference Room 806 A and B) Washington, DC 20002
October 26, 2013 ¹	1:00 PM - 4:00 PM	MLK Library 901 G St NW, Washington, DC 20001
November 21, 2013 ²	5:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 3rd Floor Meeting Room Washington, DC 20002
December 19, 2013	Cancelled	
January 16, 2014	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 8th Floor (Conference Room 806 A and B)
February 27, 2014	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 8th Floor (Conference Room 806 A and B)
March 27, 2014	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 8th Floor (Conference Room 806 A and B)
April 24, 2014	Cancelled	
May 22, 2014	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 3rd Floor Meeting Room Washington, DC 20002

June 26, 2014	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM	OSSE 8th Floor (Conference Room 806 A and B)
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¹ SAP Public Forum Town Hall

² Annual Retreat

IV. ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. PRIORITIES

The Panel launched its 2013-14 activities and efforts on Thursday, November 21, 2013, with the SAP new member orientation and annual planning retreat. The retreat's purpose was to review the prior year's work while creating an agenda for 2013-14 work. After a presentation from DBH, the SAP discussed its purpose and the role it would like to play, shared feedback from the public gathered at a Town Hall held in October, and began brainstorming priorities the SAP would like to address.

SAP 2013 – 2014 Goals

After lengthy discussion and consideration of feedback provided to the SAP at the Town Hall convened in October 2013, the SAP identified the following three priority areas, which were approved by vote of the Panel at its January 16, 2014 meeting:

1. Community Engagement
2. Resolution Assistance
3. Rigorous Programs

Ad hoc workgroups were established in addition to standing committees to lend focus to these priorities.

B. PANEL ACTIVITIES

The Panel requested and received presentations from the following agencies, organizations and individuals on a variety of topics, and were active participants in various citywide events and hearings:

- Received notice with opportunity to comment on Proposed IDEA Child Count Rulemaking
- Reviewed and Approved the SAP 2013 Annual Report
- Boards and Commissions Service Presentation: A General Overview for Effective and Successful Board Chairs and Members
- Panel members were active participants in the 5th Annual Moving Forward Together Secondary Transition Forum

- Hosted a Town Hall inviting Special Education stakeholders to give feedback to the SAP on issues to prioritize for the coming year
- Panel members attended the OSSE Student-Led IEP Film Premiere: "The Best Me I Can Be"
- Reviewed and provided comment on OSSE's FFY 12 APR
- A contingent of the SAP's legislative committee attended the DC Council's Committee on Education Open House to discuss concerns with the performance of education-related agencies
- A member of the panel, Claudia Sauls, applied to the DCPS Chancellor's Parent Cabinet
- Received advance notice and provided comment regarding OSSE's Proposed Rulemaking regarding Discipline
- Established standing committees to perpetuate the executive business of the SAP
- Received and considered regular Agency Reports from: OSSE (DSE), CFSA, DBH, DYRS, RSA
- Hosted and received regular updates from Dr. Amy Maisterra, Assistant Superintendent, Division of Specialized Education
- Reviewed the OSSE FY15 Proposed Budget Stakeholder Briefing Presentation
- Members of the panel attended the OSSE Budget Oversight Hearing with the DC Council's Committee on Education
- Reviewed the Student Hearing Office presentation
- Reviewed and summarized proposed legislation from DC Council Education Committee Chair David Catania
- Members of the panel participated in the filming of the Secondary Transition Parent Module of "The Best Me I Can Be"
- Proposed and drafted changes to the Panel's Bylaws

V. REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OSSE is collaborating with the State Advisory Panel (SAP) to coordinate a series of parent/community focus groups on local regulation that governs special education practice in the District of Columbia, with the intention of revising identified key components. In addition, input from the process will be used to inform the development of a new five-year strategic State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) for Special Education.

As part of the regulatory review process, OSSE's Division of Specialized Education (DSE) also will be releasing surveys in addition to the topic-specific focus groups on:

- Transfer of Educational Rights
- Child Find, Evaluation, & Eligibility Determination
- Specialized Instruction & Caseload/Class Size
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) & Discipline Procedural Safeguards
- Graduation Pathways, Secondary Transition, & IEP Certificate of Completion

Surveys will start in July and focus groups will start in August, with both continuing through December 2014. The priorities areas for these surveys and Parent/Community Focus Groups include:

Aug/Sept 2014: Specialized Instruction and Caseload/Class Size

Stakeholder Survey Released: July 23	Survey Closed: Aug. 13
LEA Focus Group: Aug. 20	Parent/Community Focus Group: June 4

Oct/Nov 2014: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)/Discipline Procedural Safeguards

Stakeholder Survey Released: Sept. 24	Survey Closed: Oct. 15
LEA Focus Group: Oct. 22	Parent/Community Focus Group: Oct. 29

Dec 2014/Jan 2015: Graduation Pathways, Secondary Transition, and IEP Certificate of Completion

Stakeholder Survey Released: Nov. 10	Survey Closed: Dec. 1
LEA Focus Group: Dec. 8	Parent/Community Focus Group: Dec. 15

The State Advisory Panel will use the input from these surveys and focus groups to set priorities for its plan for SY 2014-2015.

SAP members also will be working to recruit additional SAP members, with a special focus on families and youth/adults with disabilities who have successfully transitioned from school to adult life.

APPENDIX A

Members of the Panel consist of representatives from both public and private sectors who by virtue of their position, interest and training can contribute to the education of children with disabilities. A majority (51%) of the members of the Panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities.

Panel Members:

Senora Simpson -- Chair / Parent

Acquaviva, Kim -- Parent

Brown, Ja'Sent -- OSSE - Homeless Education State Coordinator

Camerata, Julie -- Community Organization

Clyde Centofanti, Betsy -- Parent

Ernst, Kimberly -- Parent

Fitzgerald, Timothy -- Child and Family Services Agency

Hiligh-Thomas, Rochanda -- Parent

Kent, Martha -- Parent

LeConte, Pamela -- Institution of Higher Education

Morilus-Black, Marie -- DC Department of Behavioral Health

Morse, Elisabeth -- DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services

Munter, Tony -- Parent

Quinn, John -- Parent

Reid-Witt, Karla -- Parent

Rihani, Elizabeth -- Parent

Rodgers, Yvette -- Parent

Salon, Rebecca -- DC Department on Disability Services

Sauls, Claudia -- Parent

Settle, Kaitlin -- Teacher - DC Public Schools

Ullman, Shawn -- University Legal Services

Whalen, Molly -- Parent

APPENDIX B

Amended Bylaws:

Section 6. Panel Member Attendance at Meetings:

Members are expected to attend regularly scheduled meetings of the Advisory Panel and participate on committees. Attendance at regularly scheduled meetings includes members participating by video conference, telephone conference, or other electronic means; except members are expected to attend in-person at least four (4) regular meetings each year between July 1 and June 30.

Panel members are to notify the Office of the State Superintendent of Education by phone, electronic transmittal, or United States mail as to whether or not they will be attending each meeting. Panel members who are unable to attend a regular meeting may send a substitute. However, such substitute shall represent the same constituency as the panel member they are representing. Representatives of government agencies that serve on the Panel who are unable to attend a regular meeting may also send a substitute. However, substitutes will not be permitted voting privileges.

Panel members should bring or have available at meetings any materials sent by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education that will be necessary to carry out Panel or committee activities. The chairperson may request a review by the Executive Committee of a Panel member's continued absence from panel meetings and will contact any member absent from two (2) consecutive meetings, to inquire as whether or not the member's current commitments make it possible for the member to continue active membership on the Panel.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education representative will send a packet of information distributed at the meeting to all members not in attendance within one week following the Panel meeting.

Section 5. Quorum:

A quorum of the Advisory Panel shall be the fifty percent (50%) plus one (+1) of the currently serving voting members. A quorum must be present for regular or specially called meetings for the transaction of business. The presence of a quorum may be achieved with members who participate at regular or specially called meetings by video conference, telephone conference, or other electronic means.